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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 YAOUNDE 001036

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [KCOR](#) [EAID](#) [CM](#)
SUBJECT: CAMEROON: "BIYA WILL SOON MAKE DECISIVE CHANGES TO
GOVERNMENT" SAYS SENIOR GOVERNMENT/PARTY OFFICIAL

REF: A. YAOUNDE 1012 (NOTAL)
[1](#)B. YAOUNDE 865
[1](#)C. YAOUNDE 37

Classified By: Acting Pol/Econ Chief Tad Brown for reasons 1.4 b and d.

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Flush with an overwhelming parliamentary majority, President Biya will move quickly and decisively to prove he is serious about rooting out corruption and improving governance, predicted Gregoire Owona in an August 13 lunch with Charge and Poloff. Owona, a senior official at the Presidency and in the ruling party, said the coming Parliamentary session will focus on the implementation of the new independent elections agency and anti-corruption regulations, including the assets declaration provision of the Constitution. Owona cautioned that Biya must moderate his reforms because Cameroon is still "fragile," and opined that "Cameroon is heavy and slow, but it advances." End summary.

[1](#)2. (U) Charge hosted Gregoire Owona, who serves simultaneously as the Assistant Secretary General in the ruling Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) and as the Minister Delegate at the Presidency in charge of relations with Parliament, for an August 13 lunch discussion focusing on the July 22 Parliamentary elections, the coming session of the National Assembly (Parliament), and President Biya's agenda for Cameroon.

Biya Will Soon Act Decisively
on Anti-Corruption and Governance

[1](#)3. (C) Owona asserted that Biya is genuine in his desire to root out corruption and improve governance in Cameroon. Biya will be emboldened by the CPDM's strong showing in the July 22 Parliamentary and municipal elections, said Owona, to remove senior corrupt officials from his own government and restructure a new cabinet focused on improving governance. According to Owona, Biya is frustrated with his government's poor performance and is determined to choose a cabinet that will improve governance on all fronts, from road building to health. Owona would not identify the senior officials likely to be removed, but speculated that the next cabinet would be smaller than the current and recent iterations.

[1](#)4. (C) When asked about Biya's apparent hesitancy to act more swiftly and boldly to reform the government, Owona cautioned that Cameroon is still a "fragile" country and that any efforts at reform carry "risks." Though he was not specific, Owona conveyed his sense that Cameroon is still susceptible to civil and ethnic violence, perhaps even worse

than the civil disturbances that paralyzed the country in the early 1990s.

Priorities for the Next Parliament

15. (C) Owona admitted problems with the conduct of the July 22 elections, but chalked them up to overzealous party officials on the local level acting independently, and he concluded that the elections reflected the will of the people. The recently elected Parliament (short the 17 seats to be decided in re-run elections) will open on August 21 to elect the "Bureau" (leadership offices), including the Assembly President, who would serve as interim Head of State in case of a vacancy in the Presidency under the current constitution.

16. (C) Owona said that Parliament will focus immediately on creating the implementing legislation needed for the new elections agency Elections Cameroon (ELECAM, ref c), the legal framework for anti-corruption efforts (especially the provisions on asset declaration by government officials), and economic reform to protect investors. Owona acknowledged that constitutional reform would be addressed in the coming Parliament but insisted the movement was driven by the imperative to improve the provisions for presidential succession (lengthening the current period before elections beyond the current, unworkable 40 days, for example) rather than the extension of Biya's mandate. In addition, Owona expressed certainty that the new Senate would be established before 2011 in keeping with Biya's pledge in his speech before the 2006 CPDM Party Congress.

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17. (C) Owona welcomed the presence of opposition politicians in Parliament, saying they would strengthen the quality of the debate. In particular, Owona said he expects John Ekindi, a former collaborator of Owona's in the CPDM in Douala and the first and sole representative of the small Progressive Movement party, to be an outspoken and dynamic player in the coming session.

A Glimpse of Biya's Work Day

18. (C) Owona offered an insider's glimpse into President Biya's day, claiming that Biya is at his desk every day from eight until five, reading and making personal decisions on an extensive array of government business. According to Owona, Biya receives separate daily briefings from Secretary General of the Presidency Laurent Esono, Head of the Civil Cabinet Jean Baptiste Beleoken, and a military aide, most likely Colonel Thomas Amougou, the acting incumbent of the President's Special Command Post (Chef d'Etat Major Particulier du Chef d'Etat) since the death of General Blaise Benae Mpecke in January. Prime Minister Inoni has a regularly scheduled meeting with Biya once a week, on Fridays. Biya receives daily, printed press briefings on local and international news.

Comment: C'est Lourde, C'est Lente, Mais Ca Advance

19. (C) Owona's predictions are congruent with what we have been hearing from other sources (refs a and b), giving us reason to be guardedly hopeful that Biya will follow through soon on his repeated pledges to remove and arrest the most egregious corruption kingpins in his government. We take Owona's cautionary note about Cameroon's fragility seriously, at least inasmuch as fears of instability seem paramount in Biya's calculations and glacial pace of action. As the conversation wrapped up, Owona offered a reminder that

Cameroon often functions on its own timeline, saying: it's heavy, it's slow, but it is moving forward. End comment.
NELSON